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By Christopher Hanson

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A defector from Moscow's KGB intelligence service said today that two out of every five Soviet dissidents were in fact KGB spies.

The defector, former high KGB official Ilya Dzhirkvelov, also told reporters at a news briefing that Soviet intelligence had compromised Western journalists -- including American, British, and French correspondents -- who agreed to write false or misleading articles in exchange for money.

Dzhirkvelov, who defected in 1980, declined to name any journalist who had been bribed.

A more common KGB method was to offer exclusive information to a correspondent and later collect "payment" in the form of articles which spread "disinformation" (deliberately false or misleading information) to advance Soviet interests, he said.

Dzhirkvelov, who joined Soviet intelligence during World War II and later sought to recruit Western diplomats and journalists as Kremlin agents, said the KGB could arrest all Soviet dissident human rights activists within two hours.

Instead it opted to infiltrate dissident groups in order to learn the identities of new activist recruits.

"Among five, maybe two are KGB agents," he said of the dissidents, adding he knew of at least one supposed ex-dissident, in "exile" in the West for some time, who in fact had been a Kremlin spy. He refused to name the person.

Imprisoned Soviet human rights activist Anatoly Shcharansky was released early today in a major East-West spy swap at the Glienecke bridge checkpoint between East and West Berlin. Shcharansky had been jailed by Moscow as a U.S. spy, but Washington denied he was one.

Dzhirkvelov said the dissident had left himself vulnerable by talking too much -- referring to the location of Soviet military facilities in talks with Westerners, which in the Soviet Union technically amounted to espionage.

Dzhirkvelov said he had participated in a campaign to discredit conservative West German politician Franz Josef Strauss in 1960, helping plant articles in Swiss, French, and West German publications that falsely claimed Strauss was a CIA agent.

Strauss, a staunch anti-Communist, was regarded at the time as a strong candidate to become chancellor. Dzhirkvelov said Moscow believed the bogus articles were what prevented his ascension. Strauss is now premier of Bavaria.

Dzhirkvelov spoke at a luncheon organized by U.S. scholars who publish Disinformation, a monthly magazine which attempts to predict Soviet propaganda moves.

The magazine's editor, Georgetown University professor Roy Godson, said a recent example of Soviet disinformation was an article in an Indian newspaper that claimed the killer disease AIDS had been caused by a CIA medical experiment which misfired. Godson said the KGB had "planted" the article.